

## I. The Story of Jesus and Nicodemus

A. John 3:1-12 . . . Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; [2] this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." [3] Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." [4] Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" [5] Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. [6] That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [7] Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' [8] The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." [9] Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?" [10] Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things? [11] Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony. [12] If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

### B. Prayer

## II. The story

A. Last Sunday we ended with vs 5, which is why we are starting with these words from vs 6 . . . That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

1. But to prepare you for vs 6, I want to remind you that last week I said there were three main views on what Jesus meant when He said, "unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

a. The first view holds that to be born of water speaks of our human birth, and to be born of the Spirit speaks of our spiritual birth. In other words, you have to be born as a human being and then reborn as a spiritual being by the Holy Spirit to enter into God's kingdom in this life and remain in God's kingdom on into the next.

- b. The second view teaches that to be born of water and the Spirit are simply two different figures of speech conveying the single idea of cleansing or purification from our past life so we can enter into our new life in Christ Jesus.
  - c. The third view says that to be born of water refers to the waters of baptism, and to be born of the Spirit refers to receiving the Holy Spirit. And as I said last week, this is the view I prefer.
2. This brings us to vs 6 where Jesus says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”
- a. And it is this verse which prompted the question about why I believe Jesus was speaking of water baptism rather than human birth in vs 5. After all, vs 5 is directly followed by Jesus speaking of human birth and spiritual birth in the same sentence.
  - b. So isn't that sufficient evidence to show that Jesus was speaking of human birth in vs 5? And the answer is NO. And here is the reason.
    - (1) Verse 5 links “being born of water and the spirit” as a unified whole, or as two parts working together to produce a single outcome.
    - (2) In vs 6, Jesus is contrasting human birth with spiritual birth. In other words, being born of the flesh and being born of the Spirit represent two different forms of birth producing two different outcomes. The flesh produces a fleshly outcome, while the Spirit produces a spiritual outcome.
3. Therefore, the point Jesus is making in vs 6 is that the flesh cannot do what the Spirit can do. The flesh can only produce more flesh while the Spirit can produce a born again, transformed, godly life that is able to see, understand, and enter into the kingdom of God – leading to eternal life with God. For example:
- a. Though being born of the flesh includes being born in the image of God, it is only those who are born of the Spirit who are given the new nature – a nature that is able to be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. In other words, those who are born of the Spirit become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3-4).
  - b. Paul affirms this contrasting difference between the flesh and the Spirit in Ephesians 4:22-24, “In reference to your former manner of life, lay aside the old self (that which is born of the flesh), which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, [23] and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, [24] and put on the new self (that which is born of the Spirit), which in

the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

- c. And in his first letter, John speaks about this contrast in these terms, “You know that [Jesus] appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. [6] No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him (see the contrast between the our old self and our new, reborn self). [7] Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous (the result of being born of the Spirit), just as [Jesus] is righteous; [8] the one who practices sin is of the devil (the result of only being born of the flesh – and not born again); for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. [9] No one who is born of God (born again, born of water and the Spirit) practices sin, because [God’s] seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. [10] By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother (1 John 3:5-10).
  4. So though we must be born as a human being to be born again as a child of God, our humanity fails us in two vital ways. First, it lacks the ability to become godly in the full and complete way God calls us and enables us to be godly. And second, our humanity actually works against becoming godly in the full and complete way God intends for those born again to become godly.
  5. Therefore, John 3:6 is contrasting being born as a human being with an old nature and being born again as a child of God with a new nature.
- B. John 3:7 . . . Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'
1. Though the words “kingdom of God” do not appear in this verse, we know from vs 3 and vs 5 that being born again and the kingdom of God are inseparably linked. Now my reason for pointing this out is because the idea of a kingdom or a nation helps clarify why we must be born again to see, understand, and enter the kingdom of God. For example, there are two ways to become a citizen of the United States.
    - a. First, you must be born in the US or in territories belonging to and under the jurisdiction of the US. Or if you are born outside the US, one or both of your birth parents must be US citizens at the time of your birth.

- b. Second, if you are born outside the US to non-citizen parents, or if you have citizenship in another country, you can become a US citizen only by fulfilling the requirements established by Congress for non-citizens to become citizens.
        - c. My point is simply this – no one born a citizen of another country can become a citizen of the US without complying with our naturalization laws.
  - 2. And in a similar way, we must comply with the naturalization laws of the kingdom of God to become a citizen of God's kingdom.
    - a. In other words, we must forsake our old life, that is, our citizenship in our birth country – which consists of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and we must be born again into God's kingdom in order to be a citizen of His kingdom.
    - b. In other words, we must die to our old self and come alive to a new nature, new beliefs, new values, new desires, new directions, a new family, a new kind of love, and a new allegiance.
    - c. You see, God's kingdom is heavenly, spiritual, and eternal. The world's kingdom is earthly, fleshly, and temporary – and the two only appear to co-exist – at this time. One day, that appearance will be done away with and the two will be separated as far as heaven is separated from hell.
    - d. Therefore, you must be born again to be a citizen of God's kingdom.
- C. John 3:8 . . . The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."
  - 1. We often ask someone we just met where they are from, and if we know the area – or at least know about the area where they come from, we can picture and therefore understand their answer.
  - 2. However, if we know nothing about where they are from, we can neither picture nor understand what they are describing.
  - 3. In this same way, it is hard for the unbeliever to comprehend and make sense of the new birth, and the succeeding life of faith, and what it means to deny self and humbly submit to God, and how we could genuinely love our enemies – just to name a few things hard or even impossible to understand until after we have been born again.
- D. John 3:9 . . . Nicodemus said to Him, "How can these things be?"
  - 1. There are two things I want to point out about Nicodemus' response.

2. First, this is the last recorded statement from Nicodemus in this story. From here on out, he closes his mouth and – hopefully – opens his ears in an effort to understand what Jesus is talking about.
  3. Second, up to this point, Nicodemus is a lot like those to whom you have talked to concerning repentance, faith in God and His son, Jesus Christ, and living the Christian life. For example –
    - a. Many unbelievers will accept things they don't understand about other subjects, yet they reject things they don't understand about God and the Christ-like life.
    - b. Many unbelievers believe in claims made by scientists, psychologists, doctors, herbalists, and exercise gurus that have no tangible or provable support. Yet they commonly refuse to believe in such things as God's revealed word, the conditions of His salvation from eternal damnation, the present and eternal consequences of living a life of sin, and the wisdom and rewards of living a life of righteousness.
    - c. And what is also sad, it seems that the more intellectually capable and the more educated the unbeliever, the more likely he is to reject God and the gospel of salvation.
  4. So Nicodemus is not an anomaly, he is representative of those in the world that we rub shoulders with every day. And so I encourage you not to be deterred by unbelief. Follow Jesus example and keep talking.
- E. John 3:10 . . . Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?"
1. There are two lessons to be learned from these words of Jesus.
  2. First, knowing what the Bible says, knowing the doctrines and theology found in the Bible, and knowing enough about what the Bible says to teach others – does not mean you understand the spiritual implications, or the practical applications of God's word. And it doesn't mean you are willing to live as one who is safe in God's hands, or that you are willing to die to self and be conformed to the image of Christ.
    - a. The incongruity here is that Nicodemus understood enough to say he knew Jesus was sent from God, but he did not understand enough to discern the spiritual truths, and implications of those truths, and applications of those truths for everyday life.
    - b. Knowing what the Bible says about God does not mean you understand the ways of God, or that you have confidence in the character of God, or that you firmly agree with the wisdom of God, or that you are living according to the will of God.

- c. And in the same way, knowing the Bible stories that illustrate and confirm the faithfulness, the power, the wisdom, and the love of God does not mean you trust God sufficiently to believe you are safe in His hands.
  - d. The sad truth is, you can be rich in Bible knowledge and poor in spirituality. It isn't until you are either living according to the truth you know or at least making a sincere effort to live according to what you know – in every area of your life – that you are both rich in Bible knowledge and spirituality.
3. Second, there are those within the church who treat the OT as if it were a less important part of the Bible. Yet Jesus clearly says that based on his position, education, and access to the scriptures – which was only the OT – Nicodemus should have been able to understand the spiritual implications of what Jesus was talking about.
- a. For example, regarding Jesus' words about being born again, we see that the OT speaks of being made new – either by God or by the Holy Spirit – at least ten times. Note: Isaiah 44:3, 59:21; Jeremiah 24:7, 31:31-33, 32:39; Ezekiel 11:19-20, 18:31, 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-29; and Psalm 51:10.
  - b. In addition, Jesus himself confirmed the importance of the OT when He said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. [18] For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:17-18).
  - c. Paul also confirmed the importance of the OT in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 . . . All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; [17] so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
4. The point Jesus was making to Nicodemus is that He (Jesus) was not talking to Nicodemus about anything foreign or outside the boundaries of what he could understand if he knew, believed in, and lived according to what he could have known from the OT.
5. And the point here for us is that the OT has much to teach us about God, the ways of God, and how to live – in very practical ways – the Christ-like life. So don't neglect studying the OT.
- F. John 3:11 . . . Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know and testify of what we have seen, and you do not accept our testimony.

1. When Jesus says “we speak of what we know . . .” it most probably includes – at least – God the Father and God the Son. This is a reasonable assumption because –
  2. As Jesus himself said, “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me” (John 7:16).
  3. And using even stronger words, Jesus said “He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me” (John 12:48-50).
- G. John 3:12 . . . If I (Jesus) told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?
1. Based on what Jesus went on to say to Nicodemus, it is reasonable to assume that here in vs 12, Jesus is telling Nicodemus that he was not as yet born again. But we will get to that next time.

### III. Conclusion – we will end with two lessons from these last two verses.

- A. First, just as the Holy Spirit inspired and was active in the writing of both the OT and NT, so this same Holy Spirit reveals the truth of scripture, and leads believers into all the truth contained in scripture, and enlightens believers in how to live according to scripture. This continued work of enabling and enlightening us to see and understand the kingdom of God and the truths of scripture takes place in those who are born again – which is why we need to be born.
- B. Second, if you imagine that you can rightly know God and rightly understand the scriptures, without obeying what God says and seriously seeking to be holy in all your behavior, then you are living as if knowing and believing a command is equal to obeying that command. In other words, you are living as if you can love God and Jesus Christ without obeying His commandments. And this is ludicrous.
- C. Therefore, may we not live as those whose faith is ludicrous (so devoid of the actions of faith as to be laughable). Rather, may we live as those convinced that understanding spiritual things in the way God intends them to be understood requires three equal parts: (1) being born again, (2) having the enabling and enlightening work of the Holy Spirit, and (3) living according to the truth we know from God’s word.